

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)

What is MERS?

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a respiratory disease caused by a coronavirus called Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV).

What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness in humans ranging from the common cold to severe respiratory illness. Coronaviruses can also infect animals.

What is MERS-CoV?

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) is a type of coronavirus. MERS-CoV was first detected in April 2012 and this particular virus had not been seen in humans before then. MERS-CoV used to be called novel coronavirus.

Is MERS-CoV the same as the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) virus?

MERS-CoV is not the same as the SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV) that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003. Both viruses are coronaviruses and both can cause severe respiratory disease. However, unlike SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV does not appear to spread as easily from person to person as SARS-CoV.

Who gets MERS?

As of September 3, 2013, human infections have been identified in persons from France, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudia Arabia, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. All infected persons had a direct or indirect connection with the Middle East. In France, Italy, Tunisia and the United Kingdom, the spread of the virus was limited and occurred in people who had close contact with a person who was confirmed or suspected to have MERS-CoV and who had traveled to the Middle East. The most up-to-date details about the number of MERS-CoV cases by country of residence are on CDC's MERS website (<http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/index.html>).

How is MERS-CoV spread?

MERS-CoV has been shown to spread between people who are in close contact, such as family members or healthcare workers providing care. It is still unknown exactly how the virus spreads (e.g., coughing/sneezing, direct patient contact or contact with the environment). Thus far, the virus has not been shown to spread easily in communities.

What are the symptoms of MERS?

So far, most people who have been infected with MERS-CoV developed severe respiratory illness with fever, cough and shortness of breath. Many have had gastrointestinal symptoms, including diarrhea. About half of those who have been confirmed as having MERS-CoV infection have died. Some people were reported as having mild respiratory illness.

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How is MERS diagnosed?

Laboratory tests (polymerase chain reaction or PCR) are available at the state public health laboratory, CDC and some international laboratories to detect MERS-CoV.

What is the treatment for MERS?

There is no specific treatment for MERS. As with other coronaviruses like the common cold, medical care focuses on providing relief from symptoms and attempts to limit the severity of the illness. Treatment is provided based on the patient's clinical condition.

How can MERS be prevented?

A vaccine is not currently available. People should follow these tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses of any kind:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact (such as kissing, sharing cups, or sharing eating utensils) with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs.

Can I travel to countries in the Arabian Peninsula or neighboring countries where MERS cases have occurred?

Yes. Currently, CDC does not recommend that anyone change their travel plans because of MERS. The current CDC travel notice is a Watch (Level 1) which advises travelers to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula to follow standard precautions, such as hand washing and avoiding contact with people who are ill. For more information, see CDC's travel notice on [A Novel Coronavirus Called "MERS-CoV" in the Arabian Peninsula](#).

What if I recently traveled to countries in the Arabian Peninsula or neighboring countries and got sick?

If you develop a fever and symptoms of lower respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after traveling from countries in the Arabian Peninsula or neighboring countries, you should see your healthcare provider and mention your recent travel.

How can I learn more about MERS and MERS-CoV?

For additional information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (<http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/>) or the World Health Organization website (http://www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus_infections/en/).

You may also call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.